

HEALTHY FOOD HERITAGES

INVESTIGATING NUTRITION ACROSS CULTURES

Low Cost	Minimal Effort	Middle School-Oriented
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Students interview friends, family, or community members to discover healthy eating traditions from diverse cultures, culminating in classroom displays about nutrition heritages.

Objective

Teach students how foods are prepared by different cultures and how these traditional foods fit into the five food groups; increase students' willingness to try new cultural or regional foods.

The Event

As part of a class assignment, students interview a member of their family, the community, or the school faculty or staff to learn about food traditions of a culture different from their own. Students can refer to a list of sample interview questions (see appendix, page 84) to help focus the discussion on ways different cultures prepare and eat fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean protein foods.

Guest speakers, such as a registered dietitian in the community, local Cooperative Extension staff, or the school nutrition director, can lead the class in a discussion about MyPlate and how foods eaten in various cultures fit into the five food groups. A local journalist or reporter can also visit the class to give the students interviewing tips.

After students conduct their interviews, they can work in small groups to create multicultural MyPlates that include traditional foods from the cultures they've explored. The class can then create a bulletin board display featuring their diverse MyPlates. Students can also research any fruits and vegetables mentioned during their interview with which they are unfamiliar, and then reflect in a writing assignment on how different cultures include fruits and vegetables at meals.

MyPlate is an important tool that helps individuals, families, and communities make healthy eating a part of everyday life. It is an icon that is supported by simple nutrition messages, and it can remind us of how to build a healthy plate no matter what our traditional foods are. Learn more about MyPlate at <http://www.choosemyplate.gov>.



[Photo] At Florida's Orange County Public Schools, tilapia tacos are on the menu for students to sample.

Planning

Determine event logistics. Work with teachers to determine a timeframe when students will conduct their interviews. Consider allowing students 2 weeks to complete their interviews. Before students conduct their interviews, invite guest speakers who can discuss nutritious food choices among various cultures, as well as review interviewing techniques. If individual interviews are not possible, consider inviting guests of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds to visit the class and have students take turns asking questions.

Share nutrition expertise with students. A week before the students conduct their interviews, have guest speakers visit the class. They can explain how foods eaten at meals are not always separate as shown in the MyPlate icon – they may be combined, such as in a beans and rice entrée. Some traditional meals may not even be eaten off of a round plate, but rather eaten from a bowl or some other vessel. The guest speaker can reinforce that MyPlate serves as a reminder to eat from the five food groups, but that this can be accomplished in a variety of ways.

Prepare for the interviews. Suggest topics and questions that students can discuss in the interview and writing assignments, such as culinary heritages, family meals, and other traditions. See page 84 in the appendix for a list of sample questions. Remind students that during their interview, they should inquire further about any foods that are mentioned with which they are unfamiliar, including any fruits or vegetables.

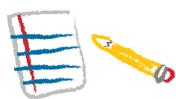
Share insights and reflect on findings. After the interviews, teachers can provide students with opportunities in class to review what they learned in their interviews and share their findings with fellow students. Invite your guest speakers to be part of this discussion.

Team Up Success



School

- Have students interview teachers, fellow students, principals, and other school staff.
- Feature students' multicultural MyPlates on a bulletin board for the whole school to see.



Classroom

- Connect students' interviews, writing assignments, and nutrition education to their English language arts, humanities/social studies, and health classes.
- Invite the physical education teacher to lead students in physical activities and games that are popular in other countries.



Cafeteria

- Highlight international dishes on the school menu and show how they reflect the MyPlate food groups by using free food group graphics from Team Nutrition's Graphics Library (see appendix, page 99).

Team Up for Success (cont'd)



Community

- Encourage students to interview community members, including supermarket managers or restaurant owners. Ensure that students are accompanied by a parent or guardian during their interview.
- Invite local chefs or registered dietitians to provide a food demonstration, showing how fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean proteins are prepared in specific cultures (emphasizing healthful cooking techniques).



Media

- Invite a local news reporter to talk about his or her job, help students learn to effectively interview others for the project, or agree to be interviewed by a student.
- Post pictures of the students' multicultural MyPlates on the school Web site.

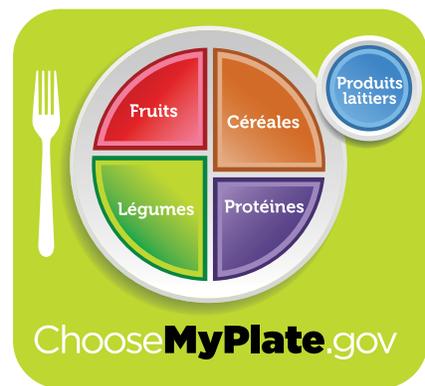


Home

- Send a letter home explaining the project, asking parents or guardians to talk to students about their family's own healthy food traditions.

Schools **IN** Action

Eastern Middle School in Silver Spring, MD, celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15 until October 15. During the month, morning announcements include interesting facts about the importance of the Hispanic culture. These special announcements recognize Hispanic heroes and celebrities, and acknowledge authors, singers, teachers, scientists, lawyers, doctors, and more. The celebration closes with a huge event that features Hispanic cuisine, music, and art.



[Photo] Students can bring MyPlates in Spanish, Chinese, and French to interviewees who speak these languages.